

MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

- Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq -

Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad

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USDA Contributes to Resettlement of Displaced Iraqis -

On July 25, Baghdad Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) AgExperts Lance Daugherty and John Ellerman and FAS/W's Aishe Allen traveled to the village of Um Al Abeed, 40 miles from Baghdad, to visit with an agricultural NGO, the Ward Shan Group (WSG), and do quality control follow-up on projects. PRT Advisors and the WSG have been partnered since 2007 to revitalize this piece of the rural economy through several projects. Recently, an irrigation project to replace and repair 3 large centrifugal water pumps to lift water from the Diyala River to canals servicing long abandoned crop fields was launched. Several thousand donums (1 donum = .25 hectare = .62 acre) will be put back into agricultural production as a result. This mission also



Nothing like the cool of irrigation water!

stopped at the IDP villages of Kazalia I & II to look at another irrigation project being proposed. IDPs are displaced persons being resettled. The Kazalia villages are neighbors but are separated by religious belief (Shia vs Sunni), and at the height of the war, the villages were largely abandoned. With improved security, residents have begun to return to rebuild their lives. This will only be possible if there is economic opportunity for them. The WSG has invited the returning villagers to join their group in redeveloping agriculture in the area. They are working to put their differences aside. This is a fragile relationship and will only succeed if benefits are realized. By extending irrigation water to the villages, The PRT hopes that reconciliation and trust between them will strengthen.

Educating Future Leaders of the Iraqi Agricultural Economy – The deadline has closed for the USDA Agricultural and Food Economics Scholarship Program which will send 10 Iraqis to the U.S. by year's end to begin work on an M.S. in agricultural economics at U.S. land grant universities. There are 50 applicants for the program. The Office of Agricultural Affairs is administering this initiative on the Baghdad end in conjunction with the Prime Minister's Office of The Higher Committee for Educational Development. Cathy Chesnutt in FAS/OCBD is the Washington POC.

Wanted: Fertilizer – None of Iraq's three fertilizer plants is currently running, and a considerable shortfall will only be averted by substantial imports. With current annual demand at about 1 MMT/year, Iraq is hoping to import 300,000-400,000 MT soon to meet fall planting requirements. Over the medium-term, local production can be substantially increased with improved power supply but privatizing these state-run enterprises is in Iraq's interest.

Personnel Update- There are currently 33 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), at Embassy Baghdad or embedded with U.S. military units.